

## What Can **PARENTS** Do?



**IF YOU SUSPECT OR IT IS OBVIOUS THAT YOUR** child is being bullied by other students and the school has not already informed you of the situation, then it is important that you contact the school immediately. Parents should have the right to expect the school to take this seriously and to investigate the facts in the case. This will usually involve talks with you and your child, with the suspected bully or

bullies and with other students in the class. Also, if appropriate, talks with a number of other parents (for example, the parents of the bullies) who may have important information to contribute.

Once the facts are on the table, a detailed plan must be drawn up of how you and the school together can put an end to the bullying.

**PARENTS AND SCHOOLS SHOULD  
TAKE “BULLYING” SERIOUSLY,  
INVESTIGATE THE FACTS, AND  
WORK TOGETHER FOR  
A HEALTHY SOLUTION.**

Although it is important that home and school work together in cases of bullying, it must be emphasized that the school should take the main responsibility to initiate and coordinate the work involved in counteracting bullying in school.

Some parents who have approached schools with their worries and suspicions about their child being bullied have had the door closed in their faces with comments such as “there isn’t any bullying at our school” or “you are worrying about nothing.” If you are reasonably sure that your child is being bullied, a good starting point for taking up the situation with the school can be to ask your child (along with you, if it seems appropriate) to keep a concise log book describing the incidents of harassment or bullying—when they occurred, who took part, and what was said and done. Then you can make a more concrete presentation when you contact the school. It can be a good idea, too, to discuss the situation with the parents of other children in the class. If they have also reported problems with bullying, it will, of course, be easier to urge the school to act.

## NOTE:

Additional information for how schools can be involved in bullying prevention programs is described later in this booklet. Please read all the information and share with your school officials.



**PREVENT  
BULLYING**

## Parents: Don't Give Up!

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**SOMETIMES BULLIED STUDENTS DO NOT** want their parents to talk with school officials. Victims often do not want to be the center of attention and are afraid of getting the bully into trouble by telling adults about what is going on. In many cases, these children have also been threatened with increased bullying if they tell. Threats cause many victims of bullying to suffer in silence or to pressure their parents not to contact the school.

In most cases, however, you are doing your child a dis-service if you do not pursue the issue. If your child will not agree to your suggestions out of fear, you must still take responsibility for sorting out the problem. Most bullied children eventually feel a great sense of relief when the situation finally comes out into the open. From a long-term perspective, it is also detrimental to the bullies when their behavior is overlooked. If the situation is properly dealt with, the bully will be helped, too.

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## Parents: Let the School Arrange a Meeting

**ONCE BULLYING HAS BEEN DISCOVERED,** the school should contact the parents of both the victim(s) and the bullies to inform them and to try to establish constructive cooperation. Since a victim's parents usually should not contact the bully's parents directly, the school could arrange a meeting at which the students, as well as their parents, are present. The aim of such a meeting is to bring about a thorough discussion of the situation and to arrive at a concrete plan of action. If the bully has damaged the victim's clothes or other possessions, it would be reasonable to bring up the question of compensation. Another aim must be to try to establish a collaboration with the parents of the bully/ies and to get them to exert their influence over their children in a purposeful way.

Many parents of students who bully others have little idea of what their child has been doing at school. When the situation is clarified for them, a number of parents want to contribute to bringing about positive changes. On the other hand, some bullies' parents try to play down the problems and generally take a defensive stand. They may not even come to meetings designed to address the problem. Even if it is not possible to establish any reasonably positive communication with some parents, a serious attempt to do so must still be made. In any

case, the bully's parents must be kept informed about the situation.

The initial meeting should not be a one-time event. It should be followed up with more meetings so that the development of the situation can be further evaluated and information can be exchanged between parents and teachers. It is, of course, also important to check that any decisions that have been made are being put into action. Under favorable circumstances, relatively positive relations can develop between the parents of bullies and the parents of the victim. This can be an important step in putting an end to the bullying.

**MANY PARENTS OF STUDENTS WHO BULLY OTHERS HAVE LITTLE IDEA OF WHAT THEIR CHILD HAS BEEN DOING AT SCHOOL.**

Sometimes, however, it is clear in advance that the relationship between the bullies' and the victim's families is tense and hostile. In such situations, it is sensible to hold meetings with one family at a time before possibly arranging a joint meeting, and it may be necessary to involve the school social worker, counselor, or psychologist.

## Parents: Make Sure the Bullied Child Gets Effective Protection

**ONE THING MUST BE MADE ABSOLUTELY** clear when an attempt is being made to resolve a bullying situation—the victim of bullying must be guaranteed effective protection. Close follow-up is needed until the danger of new attempts at bullying has passed. Teachers and school administrators have a special responsibility to safeguard the victim at school. The bullied student must be able to trust that the adults are both willing and capable of

providing the help he or she needs. If bullying problems are taken up in class in a rushed or casual manner, without ensuring that the victim is given solid protection against further harassment, the situation will almost always become worse. In order to provide the bullied student with sufficient security, close cooperation and frequent exchange of information is usually needed between the school and the student's family.



Having a child who is bullied means seeing your child become an outcast, frozen out, and completely isolated. Most of what you read is about bullies and victims who are boys. Bullying is also found among girls, but it is not so obvious from the outside. It is not usually a matter of damaged clothes or bruised arms and legs. Bullying among girls bypasses physical pain and goes right into the soul. Bullying among girls is less concrete or visible.

How can I as a mother, accuse the girls bullying my 14-year-old daughter for having **stopped phoning**, for not saying hello, for speaking badly of her behind her back, **for changing places in the classroom**, for always commenting on and making fun of what she says, etc. Nothing they do (or don't do) is against the rules.

As a mother, I have a great sense of grief and helplessness in the face of what my daughter has to go through. In desperation, I have tried to talk to the mothers of two of my daughter's previous friends. It wasn't particularly helpful; some parents just can't accept that their children are criticized by outsiders. They defend their children at any cost, no matter how ridiculous this may be.

I wouldn't wish the grief and helplessness I feel on any parents, but I wish you and your children could actually feel just for a short time what my daughter and our family have had to live with for the last 6 months or so. Then perhaps you would understand.

**Signed: Despairing Mother**



## Parents: What Can You Do If Your Child Is A Victim?

**MANY STUDENTS WHO BECOME VICTIMS OF** bullying would probably develop quite normally if they did not have to face aggressive fellow students. An essential part of counter-acting bullying in school is to stop or change the bullies' and their accomplices' behavior. The parents of children who are victims of bullying should not view bullying as an unavoidable part of growing up.

At the same time, it is also clear that many victims of bullying are unsure of themselves and somewhat anxious by nature, with relatively low self-confidence and few or no friends. So in some cases, it may be sensible for you to try to help your child adapt better to school life and other environments—maybe regardless of the actual bullying situation.

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VICTIMS OF BULLYING SHOULD NOT  
VIEW BULLYING AS AN UNAVOIDABLE  
PART OF GROWING UP.**

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Help your child strengthen his or her self-confidence, for example, by stimulating the development of any talents or positive qualities.

Help your child join other groups of children of the same age (who preferably are not in the same class at school) in sports, music, or other leisure time activities. Physical training in particular, if your child has the interest or ability, results in the child “giving out different signals” to those around him or her.

Encourage your child to make contact with (and perhaps bring home) a friendly student from the same class, or from another class. As socially excluded children often lack relationship-making skills, it is important that you, or perhaps the school counselor, help your child with concrete advice on how to go about making friends with peers.

It is important that you consistently support your child’s contacts and activity outside of the family. Try to avoid being over-protective, but keep an eye on what is going on and arrange situations that can bring about positive development.

Sometimes a child (especially the provocative victim of bullying) behaves in a way that irritates and provokes those around him or her. In such cases, you have the task of carefully, but firmly and consistently, helping your child find more suitable ways of reacting and interacting in friendship groups.

If your child exhibits some hyperactivity, it may be necessary to get extra help from a mental health professional.



## **Parents:** What Can You Do If Your Child Is a Bully?

**YOU WILL NEED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH** the school to resolve the situation. Being informed by the school or another source that your child is bullying other students may be a difficult fact to face. Making excuses and playing down your child's behavior will not

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help him or her. On the contrary, you should act quickly for the sake of the victim and for your own child's future. As mentioned earlier, children who are aggressive toward their peers are at high risk for what is known as anti-social development, including criminality and misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs at a later stage in their lives. It is, therefore, important to take time now to guide your child on to positive paths.

### **STEPS YOU CAN TAKE**

Make it quite clear that you take bullying seriously and will not accept the continuation of this behavior. If both you and the school show consistently negative reactions to the child's bullying, the chances that your child will change are increased.

Try to set up some simple rules for family interactions. Whenever your child follows the rules, praise him or her. If your child breaks the rules, consistently enforce some kind of negative consequence (for example, the withholding of allowance or other benefits/privileges).

# MAKING EXCUSES AND PLAYING DOWN YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR WILL NOT HELP HIM OR HER.

Spend 15 minutes or more of quality time with your child every day. Gain thorough knowledge into who he or she is spending time with and what they are doing. It is easier for children or young people to change their aggressive behavior if they feel they are reasonably well liked and listened to by their parents/caregivers.

Help your child use his or her energy and need to dominate in a more positive way, for example, by encouraging him or her to participate in a sport like basketball or soccer, in which one must play by the rules. Explore any particular talents your child may have that can be further developed to enhance his or her self-esteem.

If these kinds of measures, and the plan that has been set up with the school, have not resulted in noticeable changes in your child's behavior after some time, then you should get in touch with a mental health professional for more help.